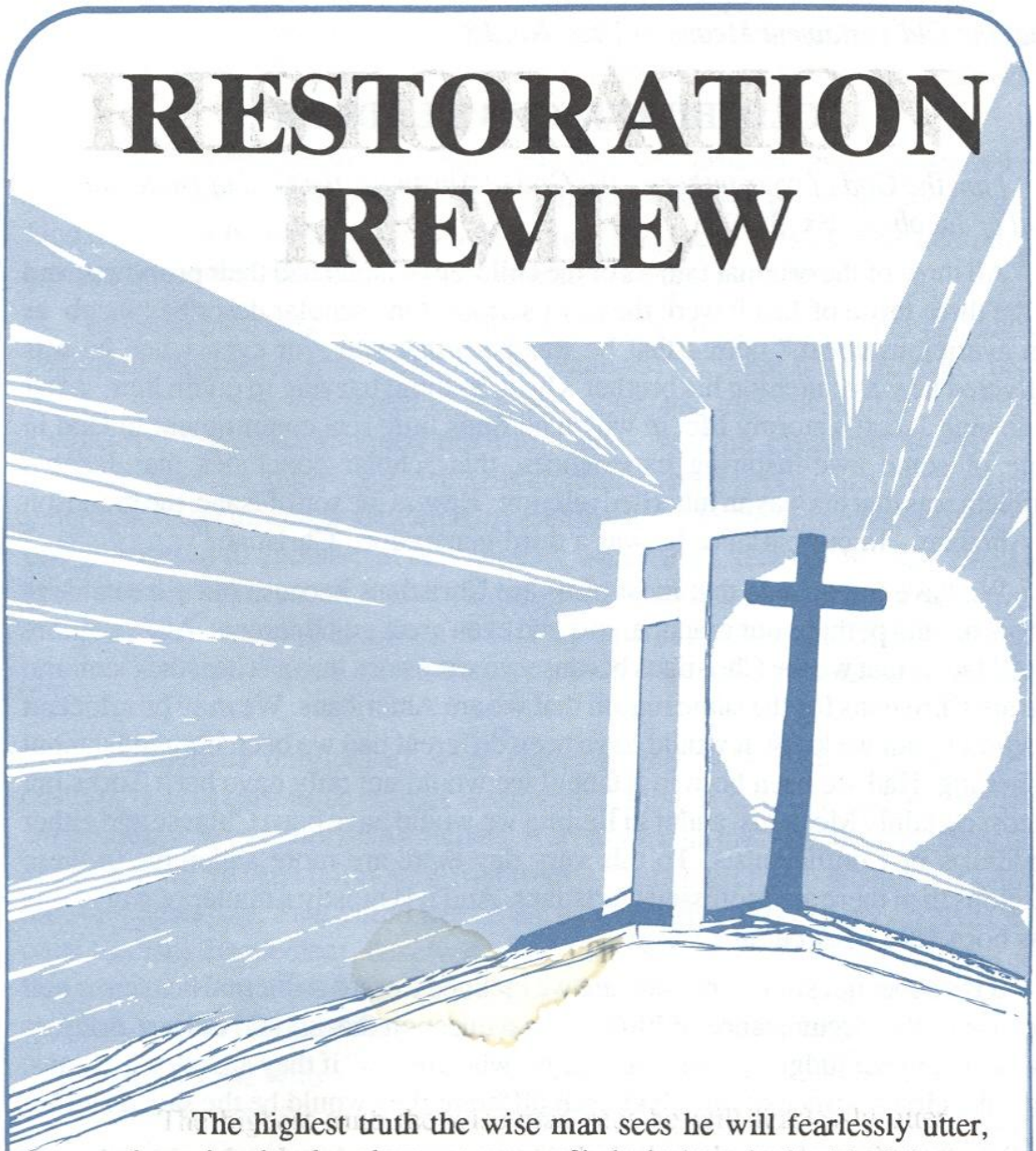
RESTORATION REVIEW



The highest truth the wise man sees he will fearlessly utter, knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world--knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at, well--if not, then well also, though not so well. -- *Herbert Spencer*

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What the Old Testament Means to Us . . . No. 18

CLIMBING JACOB'S LADDER

I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. - Ex. 3:6

All three of the original fathers of the children of Israel had their problems, and of the three those of Jacob were the most serious. One scholar describes Jacob as "an avaricious cheat," noting that he was born that way, for even when he was delivered he was clutching his brother's heel, as though trying to outdo him. After reviewing Jacob's stormy life, in which he finds little real commitment to God in spite of some awe-inspiring experiences, this scholar concludes that Jacob's problem was that his was an inherited religion. He was the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham.. In our parlance he was a third-generation "Christian."

We have to concede that most of us are Christians because our parents were before us, and perhaps our grandparents and even great grandparents. An even more brutal fact is that we are Christians because we were born into a "Christian" culture. We are Christians for the same reason that we are Americans. We may be reluctant to admit it, but we know it would have been different had we been born in Istanbul or Beijing. Had we been born in Istanbul we would not only have been Turks but almost certainly Moslems, and if in Beijing we would have been Chinese and either Buddhists or Confucianists. To this very day there are more adherents to these religions than there are professed Christians. And it is mostly a matter of where one was born, into what culture.

It is a sober question to ponder, are we inclined toward an eternal heaven or hell because of the circumstance of birth? It is a question that should at least make us less severe in our judgments of "the billions who are lost" if they are not Christians, for if the circumstance of birth had been different they would be the saved and we the lost.

It is an equally disturbing question to ask why after all these centuries of Christian missions are these non-Western nations still not Christian. The gospel was taken to Japan four hundred years ago, and all these years immense effort has been made in evangelism, but today hardly 1 % is Christian. The figures are similar in other Asian nations. Korea, where some 25% are professing Christians, is a notable exception. If anything the Arab nations have been even more impenetrable. So, it is not simply a matter of "taking the gospel to them." The history of culture has much to do with it.

My purpose herein is not to deal with the problem of the non-Christian religions, except to say that I think we can be faithful Christians without believing that all these millions and billions are doomed to a devil' s hell because they are not Christians. Even our holy Scriptures assure us that God never leaves himself without witness. They also introduce Jesus Christ to us as the Savior of the whole world.

What concerns me in this piece is whether we Christians in the Western world are not what we are more from cultural influence than by a personal encounter with God. Or to put it another way, whether ours, like Jacob's, is an inherited religion more than one based on our own experience and commitment.

It was not the case with the earliest Christians, for they came out of Judaism, paganism, atheism. Their parents and grandparents were not Christians before them. That ours is an inherited religion gives the modem church a different character. We have accepted our religion — without question? — from our ancestry. I am not implying that there is anything wrong in our Christian faith being inherited. It can indeed, and often is, a beautiful thing to see faith passed along from one generation to another. It is obviously what God intended. But still there is a problem. We must see to it that our religion is more than inherited. Somewhere along the way from childhood — and it may be gradual— we must make our faith our own through personal encounters with God. This appears to have been Jacob's need.

An inherited religion, or what David Hume called "faith engendered by custom," bas at least three serious weaknesses. First, it does not take the gravity of sin seriously. We are not really sinners, it is easy for us to conclude, and never have been since we've been religious all our lives — "taken to church when I was a baby" we sometimes say. Paul could say of the earliest Christians, "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, etc." (Tit. 3:3), but we do not feel that way about it, for we've been Christians all our lives. We did not come out of sin, we suppose, and so we do not know sin like Paul and Augustine did.

Second, those with an inherited religion tend to take it for granted, just as we are inclined to take the blessings of democracy for granted. We've never known anything else. This is why church is often humdrum. It is old bat to us. We get tired of preaching and the services are monotonous. To keep the sacred from becoming commonplace is a real problem. There is no easy solution. It is akin to the problem of satiety. Our kids, saturated by plenty, soon tire of their expensive toys, while a child in the Third World revels in a shoe box or an old tire. We are often finicky about the food set before us, while the destitute relish potato peelings. Inherited religion is subject to the malady of not wanting.

Third, we do not usually make good witnesses to our faith when it is inherited. Paul urged the Roman believers to serve righteousness *as* they bad served sin (Rom. 6: 19). It is an effective argument for people who have sinned abundantly. Now they can serve God with the same enthusiasm. Such ones will have missionary zeal. But when we are insensitive to the effect of sin in our own lives, we are not likely to feel a sense of urgency about the sins of others. Dr. Menninger's book of a decade ago, which he appropriately titled "Whatever Became of Sin?," applies to the modern church as well as the modern world.

The only way to rise above these weaknesses in our inherited religion is a personal encounter with the Lord. There is a private door through which God enters into every person's life. It is the picture we have in Rev. 3:20 where Jesus stands knocking at the door. The faith of our fathers should lead us to open the door and invite Jesus into our hearts. When that happens faith is no longer only inherited, for it is now our own.

This is what happened to Jacob, sort of, for it can be questioned whether he ever had more than an inherited faith, which did little for his selfish, conniving way of life. But there was clearly the knock at the door. We are sometimes hesitant to open the door, for when the Lord enters selfish pride has to leave. This was Jacob's problem. He was never quite ready to forget Jacob.

That night at Bethel when a stone served as his pillow he had a "knock at the door" dream. A ladder was set up on the earth and it reached into heaven. He saw angels scurrying up and down the ladder! That was almost too much for mortal man to behold, but that was not all. God himself stood above the ladder and spoke to Jacob, telling him that he was Yahweh, the God of his fathers. The Lord renewed both the land and the seed promises that he had made to Abraham and Isaac. The Lord told Jacob he would be with him and protect him wherever he went.

Jacob's response to all this was less than heroic. He did say, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it," which figures, for he had not been seeking the Lord all that much anyway. There is no evidence of his ever seeking God or praying to Him up to this time, and even here he continues with his bargaining ways. He makes an altar of his stone pillow and makes a vow that if God does for him all that He promised, and "will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear," then "the Lord shall be my God."

Even if some commentators would have it so, there is hardly a conversion experience here on the part of Jacob. No repentance of his deceptive way of life. God could have had a better subject for one of the most dramatic moments in biblical history! But therein may be the lesson of the story. Jacob was chosen because of God's grace, not because of his

goodness or his suitability. And God was faithful all the way to the covenant of grace he made with Abraham and Isaac. No matter if Jacob was a scoundrel. It was all God's grace - the ladder, the angels, the theophany. Even to a cheat who never quite overcame being one.

Even if Jacob was not repentant, he was awed, and that too is part of its meaning to us. It is a crucial step in overcoming an inherited religion. "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:17). Jacob had never talked that way before. It was an encounter with God. He named the place Bethel, the house of God. But he still had to be Jacob the supplanter who went on to bargain even with God.

In an unmistakable reference to this story in Jn. 1:51, Jesus gives the meaning of Jacob's ladder to us. And it would be in reference to one of his disciples, Nathaniel, "an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile," who was opposite in character to Jacob. When Nathaniel was awed that Jesus had seen him in his mind's eye before they had seen each other face to face, the Lord said to him, "You will see greater things than these."

Then Jesus made this astounding statement to Nathaniel: "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Jesus is Jacob's ladder! He is the gate of heaven. Wherever the presence of Christ is there's the ladder that reaches to heaven. Nathaniel was to see what Jacob saw: an open heaven, angels, the whole show with one super added attraction. The Son of Man would be the ladder. Did our Lord select Nathaniel for this special blessing because he was a searching, sincere man who hungered for righteousness, traits lacking in Jacob?

Would not such an encounter with God transform our inherited religion, more than it did Jacob's? We can see the "ladder" in our fervent prayers for more Christlikeness, when we invite Jesus into our hearts, over and over again. We see it when we reach out to our suffering world, for where suffering is there is the Son of Man. We can see the "ladder" in our corporate worship with our sisters and brothers, loving each other even as Christ loves us. We see it as we become one with all God's people the world over, united in one Spirit.

For our inherited religion to become a vital relationship with God through Christ we must become sincere seekers after truth. We must face the fact that it is an uphill struggle. Most people in the church have only an inherited religion and they don't want to be bothered with change. If it is in our hearts to see heaven open and to experience deeper and deeper encounters with God, His grace will be there to make it so. - *the Editor*

The Christian faith issues in new understandings and dogmatic formulations, in ethical response and liturgical devotion, to be sure, but the final basis of all of these, and the center out of which they grow, is the story of what God has said and done in the human realm of time and space. Apart from that story, that holy history, there is no Christian faith. It stands or falls by its telling and retelling of the "old, old story." *Elizabeth Achtemeier*

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We Must Bring Women into the Church . . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (18)

In the ninth installment of this series (Nov. 1991) I stated that if the Church of Christ is to be saved it must cease to be male-dominated. I gave a list of steps we could take immediately to include women in the ministry of the church, public and private alike, all without violating either our conscience or the Scriptures. If you have not read that piece, I urge you to do so, for I believe you will find it liberating.

In this installment I want to say more about the ministry of women, and in doing so I will urge that we "bring the women into the church," as a speaker put it recently at the Pepperdine University lectureship. I am persuaded that he said it as it is, as startling as it sounds, for we have virtually left women out of the church. They are members, of course, and their presence has always been crucial, but they are left out of the corporate worship of the church.

So, in this installment I will ride coattail on the Pepperdine lecturer and say if the Church of Christ is to be saved it must bring women into the church. That means *really* bring them to the forefront of the work of the church and cease and desist with our present male-dominated services. I'll speak plainly, as did our brother at Pepperdine: *We leave our women out, and that is a sin!*

The Pepperdine lecturer also said, "The Church of Christ is dead!" Perhaps he meant we are dying, but whatever he meant he related it to the way we have been treating our sisters in Christ. To be revived, he was saying, we must come to terms with the one line in Scripture that must be the arbiter for this entire question: *There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

If that passage means anything it means that gender is not to be made a test of fellowship or ministry, such as, "She can't do that because she is a woman." Paul himself may have sometimes fallen short of that ideal of perfect equality, due to the pressures of custom, as in the case of slavery, which he tolerated, and which is forbidden in that same passage, "There is neither bond nor free." If socio-economic conditions had been different, Paul might not have said what he did about women and slaves, tolerating their unequal treatment.

To put it another way, Paul almost certainly would not say to the 20th century church what he said to the first century church about women and slaves (and Jews!). But still he laid down the principle that applies to all generations because it so reflects the mind of Christ: In the Church of Christ there is to be no distinction between slaves and freedmen, Jews and Gentiles, men and women! We have to recognize that this was the ideal that even he was not always able to effect due to the conditions beyond his control.

Take, for example, this absolute rule to the church at Corinth: "It is shameful for women to speak in church" (l Cor. 14:35). He allows for no exception, not in that context anyway. To whom is it shameful for a woman to speak in church. To God? To Paul? To the church? It probably refers to none of these, but to the general public, and this due to biases associated with temple prostitution in Corinth. It was shameful for a woman to be aggressive and assertive, domineering over men, as they did in the temple of Diana in Ephesus, to which city he also wrote about this.

Are we to take a rule like this and apply it to the whole church for all time to come? Is it a shame for a woman to speak in a church in Paris or London or New York in 1992 ? We live in a culture where women speak in parliament, in the halls of congress, in corporate board rooms, in the public media — with no shame attached to it at all. A shame for a woman to speak in church? It may have been in the context of the problem Paul was dealing with, but not now.

The biblical grounds for leaving women out of the church is due to a faulty hermeneutics, namely, an indiscriminate application of Scripture, or supposing that if a passage applies to a given situation it applies to all situations for all time to come.

There is hardly any question but what the Bible lays down certain limitations on the ministry of women, such as in 1 Tim. 2:11-12: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." As we shall see, the apostle had what he believed were good reasons for such a restriction, and we may assume that Timothy, the evangelist to whom he was writing, took such instructions seriously as he ministered in Ephesus.

It is unfaithful to Scripture to find artful ways to "explain away" such passages. The apostle did not want women speaking (or praying) in the churches like men did (period). It is true that he creates a problem when elsewhere he calls for women to both "pray and prophesy," albeit with her head covered, as in 1 Cor. 11:5. It is generally conceded that prophesying means teaching. Is she to be silent as in the first text or is she to pray and prophesy as in the second?

I am not sure these passages can be reconciled. One might say, I suppose, that to Paul a woman is to be silent in church, ordinarily; if and when she prays and prophesies, as per her special gift, she is to do so only with her head covered. The covered head would allay the criticism that called for the restriction to start with: assertive women are associated with all the shenanigans going on in temple prostitute worship.

The reasons Paul gives for his restriction in 1 Timothy may appear odd to the modem church. "For Adam was formed first, then Eve," was Paul's first reason for women being silent. I would have difficulty telling a young sister who is majoring in music at the university that she cannot sing in church because of Adam's priority in creation. Paul's second reason is hardly more persuasive. Are you likely to explain to a sister who lectures in sociology in college that she is forbidden to teach a man in church because of Eve's priority in transgression?

If those reasons were important to Paul, one is left to wonder why he would ever allow a woman to pray and prophesy even with her head covered. Paul must have learned such reasoning in his rabbinical education. The rabbis were all men, you know. It was in fact unlawful for a woman to even study the law! The reasons Paul gave for a woman's submission may well have been persuasive to his readers. But today? Don't centuries make a difference with some Scripture, while other passages are so crucial as to transcend all time and all cultures, as does: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28)

Whether Paul was consistent or not, we must grant that he imposed restrictions upon women in contexts where this seemed appropriate to him. But it is reasonable for us to conclude that this was a temporary measure growing out of the Jewish! Greek culture of the times, and is not a rule for the church universal for all generations to come. Paul, of course, did not think of his instructions as "temporary," but for all churches for all time to come, but he had no way of knowing how things would be in cultures not yet born. To impose silence on women in today's church and say she can't teach a man appears to most Christians as a violation of "the sense of Scripture" and the one sure rule of interpretation, "the spirit of Christ."

It is hardly conceivable that Jesus Christ would say to his community today: "The women must be silent; I forbid them to teach." Paul had his reasons for saying that in his situation, and we are to accept that; but he also ruled that the woman was not to have "braided (or plaited) hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing" (l Tim. 2:9). Does this mean the same thing today?

We have no problem in saying "Does not apply" to a lot of things in the New Testament, some of which are stated as commands, such as footwashing (both a command and an example) and the holy kiss (commanded four times). And from these same passages in Paul we have the likes of head coverings and long hair, as well as the injunction against braided hair. In Acts 15 we have the apostles gathered with the whole church, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit they laid down four "necessary things" - *necessary* it reads in verse 28. We have no problem at all in totaling ignoring three of the four. (It is debatable how seriously we take the fourth one, which enjoins against fornication!) Why? Custom, we say. What is so wrong about applying the same logic to these passages about the subjugation of women?

We only need to realize the place of women in those days to understand why there would be such restrictions. While the place of woman in the home was honored in Jewish culture, her position as a whole was degrading. In Jewish law she was a thing rather than a person. To teach a woman was casting pearls to swine. In their prayers the men thanked God that they were not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.

Men would not speak to a woman in public, not even their own wife or daughter. When walking in public the woman would walk behind the man. She had no part in the synagogue service; she often sat in the gallery where she could not be seen. Scriptures were read in the synagogue, but never by a woman. She could not even teach a school.

Paul's restriction on women in 1 Timothy, along with a similar restriction in 1 Cor. 14:34-35, where it is added that if they want to learn they are to ask their husbands at home, was also influenced by Greek culture where the place of the woman was also debased. The Greek woman led a confined life, living in her own quarters and not even appearing at meals. She never appeared in the street alone. The aggressive women were associated with the prostitute cults at the Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth and the Temple of Diana in Ephesus, the two cities where Paul had imposed his restrictions. If the women in a church in a Greek city had assumed an active role, the church would have been thought of as a haven of loose women. This is why the veiled head, suggesting submission, would have blunted this charge.

Considering this background, it is impressive that women in these earliest churches had as much freedom in ministry as they had. Early Christianity went far in liberating women. The church began on Pentecost with the prophetic cry that "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2: 17). It was a woman who was chosen to bear and nourish the Christ child, and women served with him in heralding the good news of the kingdom. It was four women among his disciples that were there when he was crucified.

Women were ministers in the earliest congregations. Phoebe was a deacon (Rom. 16: 1); Euodia and Syntyche labored in the gospel with Paul (Philip. 4:2-3); several were prophets (Acts 21 :9); older women taught the younger (Tit. 2:3); it was women that helped to prepare Timothy for his work as an evangelist (2 Tim. 1:5); Priscilla taught a man the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:26).

So, when it comes to "those passages against women teachers" we should at least recognize that there are two sides to the question. I don't see that they have to be reconciled, for our task in the 20th century is not to do precisely as they did, but to do for our generation what they did for theirs, bring in the kingdom of God. And our men and women should be at it today just as their men and women were at it back then, but not necessarily in exactly the same way.

In reading Paul we are to understand that he sometimes speaks for the Lord and sometimes for himself. He draws such distinctions as "I command, yet not I but the Lord" (1 Cor. 7: 10), and "I, not the Lord, say" (1 Cor. 7: 10). We cannot always be sure when it is Paul and when it is the Lord. There is a difference, isn't there, whatever we make of apostolic authority? Most of us are inclined to pay greater heed to the words printed in red. What our Lord says is absolute and for all time and for all ages. Some of Paul's injunctions may be more temporary and circumstantial, though still to be taken seriously since he was an apostle of Christ. But not absolute.

One might disagree with Paul, both in what he sometimes did and what he sometimes said. He is a problem to us when he "kept the law" by shaving his head and undergoing temple purification (Acts 21 :26). And he probably said more than he should have said in Gal. 5:12 when he scored the Judaizers who wanted to circumcise everybody, a passage most versions tone down. When you read it in the Jerusalem Bible, Paul wishes his enemies would circumcise themselves, and adds, "I would like to see the knife slip."

An important passage in Paul is where he says "Follow me as I follow Christ." I'll buy that. But does he always follow Christ?

You will observe that Paul enjoins women's submission with: "I do not permit a woman to teach, etc." Is that the same as Christ saying it? Is even Paul saying it for all time and for all cultures? Paul has to be interpreted in the light of the world in which he lived. While Jesus lived in that same world, it is not the same with him. His life (example) and teaching transcend time and circumstance. It is inconceivable that a Christian would disagree with Christ about anything. He is Lord!

Paul is not our Lord, nor was he divine, nor was he infallible even if inspired. He properly said that we should follow him as he followed Christ. We should do just that, but not more than that.

Having said that, I can say that I am uncomfortable with this whole matter of the subjugation of women to men, and submission of wives to their husbands, as in "the head of woman is man" (1 Cor. 11:3). It may have been a needed doctrine in Paul's day and perhaps for medieval times - that's what it is, medieval - but not for today's church and today's world. We should become more Christian with the passing centuries and more mature.

I do not want my wife to be submissive to me anymore than I am submissive to her. We are equals in marriage and equals in the Lord. We make decisions together, share and share alike, joys and sorrows. It impresses me as unchristian and boorish for a man to want his wife to obey him. Perhaps he should obey her. Christ has made us one, and if there is any "authority" - I dislike that word for Christians -let it be shared equally. Christ has made us one. Let's work from that truth.

What I want for the Church of Christ down the road is that there will be no social, racial, or sexual lines drawn. None whatever. Liberties and ministries will be shared equally and indiscriminately, according to gifts and talents. We must overcome the mentality that half (or more) of the church is to be subservient to the other half. All because of gender! Christ has made us one and we are all equal - and half of us are not more equal than the other half!

We must obey Christ rather than men, and if that includes Paul or the way we interpret Paul, so be it. -- *the Editor*

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Summary and Review . . .

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN SAYING (1)

Now that my editorial career is coming to a close, I thought it would be well to give a kind of summary and review of what I have been saying all these years. It could be seen as the last word on a number of subjects, or even as an interpretation of the whole. While it is an overworked term it could serve as "the bottom line" of forty years as an editor. In an important way it is also an evaluation, for I must select only a few themes from the hundreds introduced, and the perspective has to be broad. The details and examples have already been given in hundreds of issues of this journal. Here is the substance, the heart of the matter, in three installments in the last three numbers of the paper.

An Experiment in Freedom

Whatever else I have been as an editor I have been a freedom rider, beckoning others to join the ride. I have first of all been free myself. I hardly see how any editor or writer anywhere could be freer than I have been, not even H.L. Mencken or Malcolm Muggeridge. I have been restricted by no party, hamstrung by no creed, or dictated to by any clique. I have not been for sale, not that there have been all that many trying to buy me. Nor have I had any ax to grind or any party to defend or perpetuate, which can be most confining. It is a fact that most editors of religious papers are not all that free, and their journals are often house organs.

A large part of this is because I have been financially independent, making my own living as a professor and in business while giving my time as an editor. So as to qualify Ouida for an IRA account, the paper has for many years paid her $2,000 a year for her services, which adds up to being far below minimum wage. She is really worth more than that! But you'd be surprised how a small amount like that, properly invested, can build up over the years. I accuse her of getting rich on her paltry salary!

But that illustrates our financial relationship to the paper. We make contributions to it ourselves to help keep it in the black, but I always manage to get Ouida paid. This paper has been adequately supported all these years, and we've never lacked funds when it comes to paying the bills. And yet we've never asked for help, not after the first few years at least.

I decided early on that I would ask for no donations, and that I would not even make any reference to money or needs at all. If the paper died for lack of support, then it needed to die, I figured. I am pleased to be able to say that now that we are ceasing publication, it has nothing to do with lack of funds. It is nothing less than amazing how our needs have always been met.

Most donations have been small, such as a few extra dollars along with a sub renewal. But some have been large and steady, year after year, mostly individuals but a few churches, freer ones obviously. One brother sent us $100 a month for years and years. I

always wrote to thank him, but never a communication did I ever receive from him, not one word, all those years, only the checks, and I've never met him. We wondered if he might be an angel. Suddenly he stopped, but when he stopped others took up the slack. The financial support of this paper and its general survival, apart from any "promotion" at all, is one of the great stories of its history. It confirms my faith in the remnant church. If you have something to say in behalf of renewal, the remnant will not only find you but it will sustain you.

We have of course sold lots of books through the years, a lot of hard work I might add, and the profit has gone to the paper. My speaking income through the years has also gone to the paper. And we've run a tight ship, a bit parsimonious one might say. If anything I've been more careful with the other person's money than I am with my own. We may have waited longer than we should have in getting new equipment, but what a difference the computer with its word processor, page maker, and printer has made!

All in all, it has been a labor of love and tree of financial worry.

By an experiment in freedom I mean much more than all this. I have been free to pursue any subject at all, barring none. I have been accused of sending up "trial balloons" just to see how they would fly, when I did not necessarily believe what I was writing. I would not put it that way, for in all that I have written I have believed it deserved a fair hearing in the marketplace of ideas. I will admit to holding ideas tentatively, as if to say, "This is the way I'm thinking just now, but I could be wrong. What do you think?"

My most controversial article, if but one is mentioned, is the one I did in the series on my church visits, entitled "A Church For Gays and Lesbians." My readers really gave me a hard time on that one, and some quit me. The church visit series as a whole was, however, the most popular I ever did, with many requests that I put it in book form. But in the "gay" piece I made the mistake of showing appreciation for what the gay church is doing for a rejected segment of our society, and I ventured that we should love and accept homosexuals even when we do not approve of their lifestyle, like Jesus did.

That is what I mean by being free, which sometimes costs you your blood. In my long years as an editor I've caught lots of flak for lots of things, all because I chose to be a free man in Christ.

I've invited my readers to join me in the freedom march: free to think, free to question, tree to disagree, free to be different, free to change, even free to be wrong. I've called for freedom from shallowness and mediocrity, freedom from our insipid sectarianism, freedom from male-domination, freedom from Church of Christism. Not the least has been a call for freedom from irresponsible, tradition-bound interpretation of Scripture.

Above all, however, is freedom in Christ. Freedom to follow him rather than the party; freedom to become more and more like him. Freedom to accept God's grace joyously. Freedom to love and accept as Jesus loved and accepted. Freedom to be oneself in Christ, and freedom to allow others to be different from ourselves.

An Honest Church: God's Noblest Work

I am borrowing from Alexander Pope's great line, "An honest man is the noblest work of God." That says a lot about what I've been up to these forty years. Not only have I sought to be honest but to encourage the church to be honest. All through history an honest search for truth has been rare. The crux of the conflict between our Lord and the Pharisees was that he was honest and they weren't, some of them. I have long been convinced that our people in Churches of Christ are terribly deprived, and it is a self-deprivation. Behind self-deprivation is self-deceit. We have been playing games with ourselves, such as "We just take the Bible for what it says." And other such over-simplifications.

Part of my goal has been to get people to be honest with the Bible and honest with themselves. What Lord Cromwell wrote to the divines of the Church of Scotland I have been saying to Churches of Christ, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, to think it possible that you may be mistaken." It would be a gloriously healing experience for our people, especially our leaders, to speak up and declare that we have been wrong about some things. But that requires candor that has mostly eluded us.

An honest church! It is glorious to anticipate, and I do believe that we have begun to reap the firstfruits of self-integrity, which is self-examination. It is a matter of laying ourselves open before Him who knows our hearts. It takes courage as well as honesty for a church to admit that he has been wrong and to confess that it has been sectarian. But therein lies our victory and our salvation.

Nature of Truth

As I look back over the years it is evident to me that much of what I have been saying is related to the nature of truth. We have not only searched for truth together, but we have decided that if a thousand old beliefs have to be discarded the search for truth must go on. And that together we will go wherever truth leads. I have emphasized the following:

First, while truth itself is absolute, centered in God himself, our understanding of truth is relative. Absolute truth is there, but it is always beyond our grasp. We know only in part. This is why dogmatism is wrong, for the dogmatist assumes he knows all the truth.

Second, there is a kind of paradox about learning truth, for it is like Socrates discovered, the more we learn the more we realize how little we know, and so the old philosopher could insist, "I know nothing." That is the mind of the real truth seeker: the more knowledgeable he becomes the more he realizes how ignorant he is.

Third, while all truth is equally true all truth is not equally important. Once understood this proposition can change a person's thinking. She will have a better grasp of the nature of the Bible, for she will realize that some parts are more important than others. She will come to "make a difference" in the things she believes, seeing that some things are essential, others important but not crucial, and others trivial. She will be less legalistic, less concerned to cross every T and dot every I.

Fourth, in the search for truth we must also make distinctions in the judgments we have to make of people. We speak of "brothers in error," but some errors are much more serious than others. There is error of the graver sort, such as ill-will, and errors of the lesser sort, such as being sincerely mistaken about some point of doctrine. We. will be less rigid about fellowshipping "brothers in error" when we realize that there are no other kind. We are all fallible and inclined to err.

Fifth, truth also calls for distinguishing between things that are similar but have important differences, such as between the church and the Reformation Movement. Many Christians have never heard of our movement. Other distinctions to be made are between the gospel and the apostles' doctrine and between preaching and teaching.

Sixth, that basic, essential truths about how to live are generally agreed to by people all around the world, and the essential Christian truths are agreed to by most all Christians. Our agreements are far greater than our differences, and we have far more in common than we like to admit. The problem we have about truth, for the most part, is not knowing truth (the truths that really matter) but in practicing truth. We know far more than we do!

For instance, except for a few wild-eyed cults, every religion and philosophy the world over believes in the sanctity of human personality, and that we should treat each other decently and humanely. A very crucial truth, indeed, and we hold it in common. But we don't practice it. Every religion believes in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, but we don't practice it very well, as the condition of our world indicates.

The human predicament is, therefore, due to our sin, being unfaithful to the great truths that we all know and agree to. We know the truth but we do it not.

So, the most neglected truth of all is that it is urgent that we repent and cease doing the things we know to be wrong and start doing what we know to be right. Truth by its nature is always liberating. Truth sets us free. But only when do the truth. - *the Editor*

(to be continued)

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WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

Cecil Hook

Alexander Campbell's response to this question raised in the famous Lunenburg Letter aroused a long discussion by those who disagreed with him. The matter is still being debated.

Why cannot we lay this question to rest once for all? It is because there is no definition of a Christian in the Scriptures!

The Scriptures do not say, "They called themselves Christians." There is no record of a follower of Jesus taking that designation for himself or applying it to others. Neither do we read that God called them Christians. But we do read that "in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (Acts 11 :26).

Somebody called the disciples Christians. Who was that somebody? Not other disciples. Not God. Evidently, the populace of Antioch did. Agrippa used the term with a sneer (Acts 16:28), but Paul avoided use of that name in his reply and in all of his writings. In their persecution believers were being called Christians disparagingly, in the same manner in which some had been referred to as "the sect of the Nazarenes" before, and Peter urged them to accept that supposedly derogatory epithet unashamedly in a manner which would glorify God (1 Pet. 4: 16).

Who were being called Christians? Disciples. That is what they were, disciples! But they were being called something else. Why do we make such a big thing of calling ourselves Christians and so seldom identify ourselves as disciples?

Who, then, is a disciple? After his resurrection Jesus sent the eleven disciples out to preach the gospel. He told them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ." (Mt. 28:19f). Acceptance of the gospel made people disciples. The disciples were to be baptized. Then they taught as disciples. Belief in the gospel made them disciples and then, after baptism, they were guided and nurtured toward maturity as followers by the doctrine.

A disciple is a learner, believer, or follower. When a person develops a conviction about Jesus that makes him want to learn more and follow him, that person is a disciple. He is a disciple from the time of the germination of the seed into faith until he dies as one mature in Christ.

We are at different points on the road, but need we try to define certain stages on the heavenward journey when one becomes acceptable to God, and to us? Where are those definitive milestones between the start and the finish? Although there is a continuous process of development of a new human life from conception to death, there is no period of unacceptability, for one's personhood is recognized all the way. So it is with being a disciple of Christ.

If the disciple holds some error in the earlier stages of belief, must we reject him or her? If so, all of us would have to be rejected, for none of us is ever totally free of error. Jesus wanted his new disciples to be taught all his commands. Teaching is a continuous process needed even by the most aged and mature of us.

Why are we so eager to define who is a Christian? Is it because we need some measurement by which we can readily accept and reject? Do we settle for artificial distinctions?

Why are we so eager to reject others? Is it to satisfy our smugness? Is it a fear that others may defile us? Fellowship with an immature learner is no more compromising than including infants in our society. To recognize a person as a fellow disciple does not mean we approve of his errors or misconduct. If it did, we would have to cut ourselves off from most of those in our congregation.

Baptism has been our hangup. It is our line in the sand. We judge anyone who has not crossed that line. It is true that baptism is an essential command of Jesus, but so are the rest of his directions. In his growth in Christ the disciple does not have to be perfect in knowledge and obedience to be acceptable to God. Who could ever claim such an achievement? Whenever a disciple refuses to obey what he knows to be the truth, he ceases to be a disciple indeed. That is scary, for none of us does all that he knows to do. So, who are we to judge others who are walking the same road with us, only at different stations?

Millions of disciples with whom we have no association have been baptized according to their understanding. Because they have not observed our scruples, we have felt free to judge them and declare them unfit for our fellowship. Instead of considering them fellow-learners who need loving instruction, we count them as adversaries. Can we reject those whom Jesus accepts and expect him to accept us?

There are those in our own congregations with whom we disagree, who lack in understanding and fall short of perfect obedience, but we share the common life with them. Why do we accept them while rejecting others who have similar shortcomings?

Who is a disciple? Jesus gave us the identifying mark: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (In. 13:35). He also said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples" (In. 8:31), and, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (In. 15:8).

Why did he not mention baptism? You may reply that baptism is included in "if you continue in my word." If so, all other commands are also included. Jesus did not elevate baptism above the rest as the crucial test as we are inclined to do. A sincere learner may be loving, continue in his word, and bear much fruit without ever understanding baptism the way we do. God will judge righteously; we are to accept lovingly.

If you suppose that disciples and Christians are identical, consider this: If disciples exist before and apart from baptism, so must Christians; and if disciples must continue to learn and to obey as they are able to understand, so must Christians. *—1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

In August Ouida and I had a bang up good time at the World Convention of Churches of Christ in Long Beach, along with upwards of 2,000 others from many countries. Arriving a day early we were able to case the joint, walk along the beach, and dine at a quaint place in Shoreline Village. It was the first time in ten years that we were able to get away together like that. The convention was super. Fred Craddock, the main speaker, was inspiring. We heard Disciples and Independent Christian people who regularly attend their own conventions say the WCCC has a quality not found in the others, the international flavor being one. There were over 300 from Australia and New Zealand, and delightful sisters and brothers they are. There were only a few Church of Christ folk present beside ourselves, but those that were there insisted that it is too great an experience not to be shared by more. So, for the next WCCC in Calgary in 1996 we are planning to get the word out better than we did this time. Since I did the Bible study guide for the convention

and addressed the layman's breakfast, we had some very special experiences. Ouida felt like a celebrity since she met so many people who had read about her but had not met her. They wanted to know how she pronounced her name!

Just before we left for Long Beach we suffered the loss of my dear sister, Joann Jones, who died in Dallas at age 79 on July 30 of cancer. She and I were very close and had gone through a lot together. A widow, she bravely bore much tragedy in her life. She always said she wanted to go first, for she wouldn't be able to bear my leaving her. It was very sad. There were seven of us boys and she was our only sister. Only three of us remain. The grim reaper takes no furloughs. One day 18 of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren crowded into her hospital room to say goodbye. She donated her body to science. A memorial service was held for her at Stevens Park Christian Church near her home. She was an avid reader of this paper, and she would probably joke with me that she would never want to be found dead in this column. She almost made it! Ouida and I are not all that good at singing, but along with praying with my sister in her last hours, we sang to her and we believe she recognized the hymn that reflects her faith:

Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead
me on, help me stand
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Thro' the storm, thro' the night, Lead me on to the light

Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Things have so changed in Eastern Europe that Billy Graham can now hold a first ever stadium crusade in Moscow, which he does this month. It has not been all that long since Bibles had to be slipped in and church life was severely restricted. And now the gospel can be freely proclaimed in a great stadium. Wow!

Two of our preachers in the Church of Christ are going to have a debate in Bowling Green, Ky., Nov. 30-Dec. 4, at the West End Church of Christ. The proposition is interesting: "The Scriptures teach that all divorced people, including those whose former mates are still living, may, with God's approval, enter and maintain a marriage with another person." Olan Hicks, Searcy, Ark., will affirm, J. T. Smith, editor of *Gospel Truths*, Tulsa, will deny. While it has not always been the case, the majority of those in Churches of Christ, including the preachers, would now come nearer agreeing with brother Hicks, and he is one reason why that is the case. The issue, which has caused lots of grief among us, has been an extended crusade for him. Both are good, sincere men. It should be conducted in a fine spirit.

The Catholic Views Broadcast, Inc. has issued a mailout in defense of Dan Quayle's controversy with Murphy Brown. Their lead question: "Should single mothers be glorified on television?" It charges that the sexual revolution causes family breakdown, crime, violence, and leads to babies whose parents aren't married. It calls for grassroots support for the embattled vice-president.

I am impressed with a new Methodist preacher in our town. He hit the ground running, telling people that he is a Christian, first and last, who happens to be preaching for the Methodist church. I would also be impressed if our preachers had that spirit, "I am a Christian who happens to be preaching at a Church of Christ." Once we transcend our sectarian thinking like that, unity among all Christians will be on the horizon.

Ouida and I listened with interest and some concern to both political conventions, especially the acceptance speeches of Bill Clinton and George Bush. We also watched in disbelief as Ross Perot withdrew from the race. He would have made it more interesting and would have helped sharpen the issues. As the election nears we recommend the Quincentennial Election Prayer issued by Eternal Life, an organization of Roman Catholic laity, which reads in part: "Enlighten the minds of our people during this quincentennial year of the discovery of America. May we choose a President of the U.S., and other government officials, according to Your Divine Will."

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READER'S EXCHANGE

Why can't we be free to worship our Maker in different ways without being condemned in what we do or how we do it, so long as we don't force our personal worship on others? Our worship often seems cold and formal to the point of ritualistic. Let us pray for the fire we used to have at the beginning of what we call the Restoration Movement, and for freedom from legalism and sectarianism. - *David Aechternacht, Irving, TX.*

Since the first *Restoration Review* (accidently ?) fell into my hands I have known that God turned loose among us one who was called according to His purposes, and I have regularly since that time given thanks to God for you. I find that re-reading the bound copies is excellent exercise of mind and spirit. -*Forrest Haggard, founding pastor, Overland Park Christian Church, Overland Park, Ks.*

(I am pleased to report that Forrest is the interim general secretary of the World Convention of Churches of Christ, and will serve until Lyndsey Jacobs moves here from New Zealand to be our permanent secretary. Forrest is a great spirit and a shepherd-like minister. In the same letter he tells how a Christian Church (Independent) refused him fellowship because he preached for a Disciples church. That was back when feelings ran deep between the two groups. When that same church years later remodeled its building, they saved one of the antique pews for Forrest in honor of his ministry. "It serves to remind me that grace and love can overcome," he wrote. There's no way not to love Forrest for long! - *Ed.)*

I was a small cog in the non-institutional wing of the Church. When I studied myself out of such legalism and began to write about grace rather than works, I was not emotionally prepared for the avalanche of hatred and ignorance that descended upon me. I was branded a heretic, a false teacher of the gravest magnitude. My name rang out from numerous pulpits, sometimes when I was present. Some of the institutional bend joined in the fray and I had confrontations with them too. I have found a way of uniting the warring factions. All one has to do is to point out their perversions of 2 Jn. 9-11 as the mandate for disfellowshipping each other. Instantly they stop fighting each other and turn to meet such an audacious enemy that dares to destroy their launch pad for missiles against each other. - Arnold Hardin in *The Persuader*

This from Herbert Spencer reminded me of you and some of your front page quotes: "The highest truth the wise man sees he will fearlessly utter, knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the world - knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at, well - if not, then well also, though not so well." With much affection. - *Bob Johnson, Siloam Springs, Ar.*

We treasure our copies of *Restoration Review* and will miss them after you cease publication. There did seem to be some hope in one issue that you will not discontinue completely. Neal and I do love and appreciate both of you. - *Inez Buffaloe, Conway, Ar.*

I am writing because I am concerned about the moral condition of our country . We are asking friends, relatives, churches, and civic groups to pray for America. I decided to stop complaining and do something. We hope you will join us in prayer. We love our country too much to see it destroyed by evil. - *Mary McNayr, Lawton, Ok.*

Your article about the stretcher inspired this story: There was a man who wanted his short son to be tall. They tried pituitary extract, weightlifting, steroids, everything. A doctor friend advised that he get some blocks and tackle, ropes and pulley and try stretching him on the kitchen table, exerting a gentle pull. Sometime later the doctor asked how it worked and if the son was any taller. "No, he hasn't grown any," said the father, "but he has confessed 50 crimes. - *Kenneth Jowell, Vallejo, Ca.* (96 *years old*)

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BOOK NOTES

Carl Ketcherside's *The Twisted Scriptures* has been out of print for several years. We are pleased to announce that it has been republished and is available at $7.95 postpaid, with an introduction by Leroy Garrett. It exposes the way we have abused the Bible in order to perpetuate our divisive ways.

Our back issues are available at 40 cents each or 15 for $5.00 postpaid. Unless you specify otherwise these will be selected at random from many years back. We have six bound volumes, one single volume and five double volumes, 11 years total, from 1978 through 1990 (except 1979-80), $65.00 postpaid, which is less than the sub rate.

For only $9.95 postpaid we will send you a copy of *Our Heritage in Unity and Fellowship*, edited by Cecil Hook. It is made up of select articles from Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, along with an interesting introduction by Cecil Hook. It is a beautifully designed paperback of 350 pages. The articles are not only on unity and fellowship, but on such topics as "Historic Notes On Our First Church," "The Sand Creek Declaration," and "Our Costliest Sin."

Jack Cottrell's *Feminism and the Bible* is a Christian response to the feminist movement, which the author sees as a movement against the church. It identifies four streams of the movement and discusses their influence upon our society. Abortion is discussed in this context. The author shows that the Bible is not anti-woman as the feminists claim. The issues discussed, the author believes, affects us all, men and women alike. $15.50 postpaid.

The Fire That Consumes by Edward Fudge is a biblical and historical study of the doctrine of final punishment. He concludes that the Scriptures teach that the wicked will be destroyed in hell but that there is no such thing as endless torment. A basic thesis is that humankind is not by nature immortal but that eternal life is a gift of God only to the saved. It is persuasively argued. We can supply you a copy at $21.00 postpaid.

The Divorced and Remarried Who Would Come to God by Homer Hailey is a significant book because the author has suffered rebuke and rejection from his segment of the Church of Christ for writing it. He says the divorced and remarried may come to God without breaking up still another marriage. $5.50 postpaid.

If you are a William Barclay reader you will want his delightful little book, *A Spiritual Autobiography*, which we can send you for $2.50 postpaid.

Karl Barth was one of this century's great theologians. If you want to see how he influenced many leaders in the church, then read *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, edited by Donald McKim. It is a good way to learn more about a very influential thinker. $7.00 postpaid.

In *Through A Looking Glass* John Timmerman tells the story of his life in a tight-knit religious and ethnic community. A preacher's son, he tells of experiences with which many of us can identify. It is a warm human interest story of one with strong faith in God. $.5.50 postpaid.

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